



Meeting Summary

Oregon Entanglement Advisory Committee

April 4, 2025, 8:30am – 12:30pm

Attendance

ODFW facilitators: Brittany Harrington, Kelly Corbett, Troy Buell, Justin Ainsworth

Present members: Crystal Adams, Aaron Ashdown, John Calambokidis, Edward Chin, Bob Eder, Ben Enticknap, Sheila Garber, Mike Giles, Amanda Gladics, Scott Hartzell, Francine Kershaw, Shon Landon, Joy Primrose, Jim Rice, Gary Ripka, Leigh Torres, Heather VanMeter, Justin Yager

NMFS advisors: Justin Greenman

Non-members: Alondra Aeling, Tom Banse, Caren Braby, Kim Corcoran, Kristy Long, Lindsey Noordman, Natasha Novikova, Shannon [last name unknown]

Introduction and ODFW Updates (slides 2-7 of the [meeting presentation](#))

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) convened the fourth meeting of the Oregon Entanglement Advisory Committee (OEAC) on April 4, 2025.

ODFW welcomed OEAC members and other attendees, including four new OEAC members that joined the group since the last OEAC meeting to represent the commercial crab industry (Shon Landon and Gary Ripka), recreational crab fishery (Edward Chin), and conservation interests (Francine Kershaw). ODFW provided a brief overview of the last OEAC meeting, held in May 2024 and introduced today's agenda.

ODFW reviewed all entanglements that occurred on the West Coast in 2024 and those attributed by NMFS to Oregon crab gear in 2024 and 2025 to date. ODFW answered clarifying questions about several cases, and gear owners involved in two 2024 cases were present and provided additional comments about those events.

ODFW provided an update on progress towards electronic monitoring in the crab fishery, including an ongoing electronic logbook pilot program and next steps. ODFW plans to propose regulations for vessel monitoring by the 2026-27 season and for an electronic logbook by the 2030-31 season (but widely available for voluntary use much sooner). Several members asked about how the system being piloted in Oregon differs from what has been implemented in other states or in federal fisheries. ODFW explained that there will be differences in reporting requirements by state and that the electronic logbook that is being developed for use in Oregon will provide additional information through a separate application that is integrated with vessel monitoring systems. Several members emphasized the importance of streamlining and simplifying the application and minimizing user inputs.

ODFW provided a brief update on a policy option package included in ODFW's budget bill (HB 5009) that includes a permanent Marine Life Entanglement Project Leader position, which has been staffed through a series of limited duration appointments for the last few years. This bill is currently being discussed by the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. If legislatively adopted, this position will support the agency's work to address marine life entanglements in a number of ways. OEAC received information on how to comment on this bill, if interested.

Take Reduction Team Update (slides 8-10 of the [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW provided an update on what was known at the time of the meeting about the West Coast Take Reduction Team (TRT). The group had a number of questions about the scope and timeline of the TRT, and expressed major concerns about the lack of answers from NMFS to those questions. A NMFS advisor shared that there will likely be changes to the preliminary scope and start date of the TRT. They apologized for the uncertainty and said that an update from NMFS should be coming soon.

The information presented by ODFW is included in the slides linked above but is now outdated. Since this meeting, NMFS has announced that the scope of the TRT has been changed to include two strategic marine mammal stocks (Central America/Southern Mexico and Mainland Mexico stocks of humpback whales) and the federal sablefish pot fishery. Under the terms of a 2023 settlement agreement, the team will be established by October 31, 2025, and the first meeting will be convened by November 30, 2025.

It is unclear at this time when the Oregon, Washington, and California commercial Dungeness crab fisheries may be brought into the TRT process. ODFW will continue to engage with NMFS and hopes to learn more about if or how these changes may impact the conservation plan and incidental take permit application process.

Pop-up Gear Knowledge Exchange Scoping (slide 11 of the [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW shared that they are working with several partners to plan a pop-up gear knowledge exchange that will likely be held this summer in Astoria, OR. The goal is to provide an opportunity for attendees to learn more about pop-up gear technology from existing users, such as crabbers in CA that have been testing the gear. ODFW asked the group to provide feedback on what they would like to get out of an event like this, any questions that should be addressed, and how to foster interest and engagement from the Oregon crab fleet.

Several members had questions about how the gear may be used in Oregon in the future, the reliability and cost of gear tested in California, and how other ocean users will know where the gear is located. They shared concerns about gear loss and the feasibility of using pop-up gear off Oregon where ocean conditions are more intense than off California. ODFW is still considering options for how this gear can be used in Oregon, but one option would be to allow its use in some capacity outside of 40 fathoms after May 1st. A PSMFC representative spoke about work they are doing to knit together data from pop-up gear, VMS units, and logbooks into a functional gear tracking application. This developing technology may address some of the concerns of the group. Members discussed how this gear may work for some vessels in some areas, but not across the board.

Overview of Major Conservation Plan Updates (slides 12-17 of the [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW provided an overview of the status of the draft conservation plan, highlighting several key sections and how they have been updated. ODFW has ramped up coordination with NMFS Office of Protected Resources staff in recent months and is now meeting biweekly to ensure that

the draft will be adequate and complete when an ITP application is submitted. ODFW is aiming to have an adequate and complete draft by this summer. ODFW will share a full draft with OEAC members to provide an opportunity for input prior to formal submission. ODFW also shared that the scope of the CP has been expanded to include fin whales, in addition to humpback whales, blue whales, and leatherback sea turtles, due to the 2024 fin whale entanglement attributed by NMFS to Oregon crab gear. One member commented that fin whales are off Oregon in fall and winter, and are more offshore, so the same management measures may not be effective for all covered species.

ODFW shared a complete list of the CP's conservation measures, which fall into three categories: avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. ODFW has been working to implement most of these measures in recent years and those that require rulemaking are now in place.

ODFW walked through two draft figures that lay out the CP's proposed monitoring and adaptive management strategies. Monitoring is a critical CP element that allows ODFW to evaluate whether conservation measures are effective at achieving CP objectives and ensure that permitted take levels are not exceeded. Monitoring activities include both fishery monitoring and entanglement monitoring through improved identification of Oregon crab gear and improved detection and documentation of entangled animals.

Adaptive management is another critical component that outlines steps that will be taken should monitoring indicate that CP objectives are not being achieved or that action is needed to stay within permitted take levels. The proposed adaptive management strategy includes three distinct pathways and categories of management actions which will be implemented if certain triggers are met. The first pathway is preventative and is triggered in response to late-season entanglement risk not being sufficiently reduced by collective late-season measures. The second pathway is in response to confirmed entanglements and relies on population-specific triggers designed to keep the rate of entanglements low enough to stay within permitted levels. The final pathway is a backstop that defines actions that will be taken if the permitted take level has been reached for any covered species.

Adaptive Management Discussion (slides 18-21 of the [meeting presentation](#))

ODFW discussed the record high level of total whale and humpback whale entanglements attributed by NMFS to Oregon commercial crab gear in 2024. There was also a humpback whale entanglement attributed by NMFS to Oregon crab gear in January 2025, which is the earliest that one has been reported in a given year on record. ODFW shared that, in response, fleet advisories encouraging voluntary action to reduce entanglement risk were issued in response in August 2024 and January 2025, but the department remains concerned about this elevated level for several reasons.

ODFW stated that, first, the ITP and TRT processes are ongoing and so it is important to keep entanglement levels low. Second, NMFS must determine that the mortality and serious injury occurring incidental to commercial fisheries will have a negligible impact in order to authorize incidental take under the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and the level of mortality and serious injury resulting from recent entanglement events attributed by NMFS to Oregon crab gear is

likely approaching the negligible impact threshold. Third, the five-year (2021-2025) running total of confirmed entanglements prorated to the Central America distinct population segment (DPS) is currently at 3.4 animals, which is likely near the trigger that will be proposed in the draft conservation plan. For these reasons, ODFW shared that they are considering the need for an interim adaptive management response if another humpback whale entanglement is attributed by NMFS to the Oregon crab fishery in 2025. Interim action would aim to reduce impacts to humpback whales, reduce the likelihood of more extreme management actions in the future, increase the likelihood of ITP approval, and position the fishery for success in coastwide TRT negotiations (which are now uncertain).

ODFW asked the group for feedback on a list of potential responses (see Slide 21) and recommendations for which should be considered by the department.

ODFW answered several clarifying questions from the group. One member asked if take is weighted differently depending on whether it occurs during or after the crab season. It is not; however, the timing is taken into consideration when determining an appropriate response. One member asked whether a response would require rulemaking and how that would affect the timeliness of implementation. In most cases, a temporary rule could be promulgated quickly, if needed. If permanent rulemaking was needed, that would be a more involved process. Another member asked how an entanglement would be identified to the DPS level to compare against DPS-specific triggers. If the DPS is known, the entanglement would be assigned fully to that DPS. If it is not known (which is more common at this time), it would be prorated between the Mexico and Central America DPSs using the proration factors from the most recent humpback whale stock assessment reports. Another member added that fluke photos are the best tool for determining which DPS an animal belongs to. One member asked if only entanglements in Oregon count towards triggers. ODFW responded that all entanglements attributed by NMFS to Oregon crab gear will count, regardless of where they are reported.

There was some discussion amongst members about the potential options. Members expressed concern with all of the changes that have already taken place in the fishery and limited room to do more, as well as, the need to do what we can to prevent more impacts to the season like there have been in California. Several ideas were discussed including the need for improving derelict gear recovery provisions and addressing those that use the ocean as 'storage' for their gear while participating in other fisheries. One member was surprised to see area closures so low on the list and shared that they are working on more spatially and temporally explicit information on whale presence by DPS that will hopefully be a valuable tool for employing something like area closures. Another member expressed concern that area closures may result in more pressure in other areas due to effort shift.

Several members expressed support for consideration of depth restrictions. Some ideas that were mentioned were bringing the depth restriction shallower to 25-30 fathoms, or implementing a 50-fathom depth restriction starting April 1st. The group also discussed the concept of a more regional approach to depth restrictions that takes into account different bottom topography and fishing patterns along the coast. One member expressed support for lower pot limits, in addition to depth restrictions. Another member recommended ODFW consider permanent adjustments to the late-season depth restriction and pot limit reduction,

rather than relying on adaptive management. One member emphasized the need to think about co-occurrence between whales and crab gear, in addition to entanglements. ODFW commented that electronic monitoring will really help provide more up-to-date information on that overlap.

One member asked if our take should be going up since the humpback whale population is increasing off the West Coast. ODFW is working with NMFS to determine appropriate requested take levels, but is trying to make sure population growth is considered. Those numbers are still being determined.

Public Comment

ODFW staff provided time for public comments, but none were made. ODFW staff wrapped up the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation and relaying that a meeting summary will be provided to the group soon. Follow-up questions and input can be provided via email or phone.